

General William Floyd House  
Approximately .29 mile south of intersection  
of Washington Avenue and Wavecrest Drive  
Mastic Beach (Long Island)  
Suffolk County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5427

HABS  
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52-MAST  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-5427  
HABS  
N.Y.

GENERAL WILLIAM FLOYD HOUSE

52. MAST.

Location: Approximately .29 mile south of intersection of Washington Avenue and Wavecrest Drive, Mastic Beach (Long Island), Suffolk County, New York.

Present Owners: Mrs. Cornelia Floyd Nichols. Mrs. David Weld, Box 631, New Mill Road, Smithtown, Long Island, New York. Mr. William Floyd Nichols, Box 549, Judge's Lane, Smithtown, Long Island, New York.

Present Occupant: Caretaker in residence.

Present Use: Seasonal residence.

Brief Statement of Significance: General William Floyd, the son of the original builder, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He was born here in 1734 and lived at the manor until he moved to his upstate holdings at Westernville in Oneida County in 1803. The Mastic Beach house is thought to be-- with the exception of the house at Westernville-- the only extant house of a signer in New York State. It is also reputed to be the best preserved and oldest manor house remaining in this section of Long Island.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners; chronology:

1718 - Deed for land "lying from Smithtown on the northwest to Forge River on the southeast" obtained "for good and lawful money in hand payed" by Richard Floyd. (Mrs. John Treadwell Nichols, Addresses . . . Mastic, Long Island, p. 1)

Between 1718 and 1734 - First section of present house begun by Richard Floyd's son, Nicholl. (William Floyd, the Signer, was born here in 1734. He was the son of Nicholl and Tabitha Smith.)

1755 - Nicholl's death; property conveyed to William, the oldest male heir.

- c. 1804-5 - General William Floyd left Long Island for Western (now Westernville), New York, and "gave his home to his son, Nicholl." (Osborn Shaw, Addresses . . . Mastic, Long Island)
- c. 1804-5 - 1852 - in possession of William's son, Nicholl Floyd ("The Squire") (b. 1762 - d. 1852).
- c. 1820 - period of greatest success and prosperity as a farm.
- 1852 - John Gelston Floyd, Sr. ("The Judge") (1806-1881), youngest son of Nicholl inherited the house.
- 1881 - John Gelston Floyd, Jr. (1841-1903), a younger son of John Sr. inherited the house. "It was during his tenure of Mastic that the place ceased to be a working farm and became simply a summer home." (Mrs. John Treadwell Nichols, "As Told . . . Cornelia Floyd Nichols," p. 44).
- 1903 - William, Rosalie, and Cornelia Floyd inherited the house. "Rosalie soon sold her interest to her brother and sister . . . [William later] generously made over his half of the place to his sister's children and for the first time the name Floyd disappeared from the tax rolls of Mastic Neck." (Mrs. John Treadwell Nichols, "As Told . . . Cornelia Floyd Nichols," p. 45). The children of Mrs. Nichols are listed as present owners.

2. Date of erection:

The first construction was probably started in the 1720's or early 1730's. (One of the listed sources states c. 1724.) According to the physical evidence, much of the main block and side wing was built or extensively altered in the mid-18th c. By the early 1800's the building, except for the rear (north) 1880's wing and its 1920's additions, was substantially complete.

3. Architect:

No documentation has been found which indicates the name of either a master builder or "architect." Most of the work was probably accomplished in the 18th c. by slave labor and by local craftsmen under the supervision of members of the Floyd family.

4. Notes on original plans and construction, etc.

None known.

5. Notes on known alterations and additions, etc.

See architectural data.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

Richard Floyd, a Welshman who first settled in Massachusetts in the 17th c. and later moved to Huntington and then Setauket, was the first of the family associated with the history of Long Island. His son, also Richard, was the first owner of the property on Mastic Neck on which the General William Floyd House now stands. Nicholl, the son of the second Richard, was the first to build on the property.

General William Floyd, the second child of Nicholl, was born here in 1734, and as a signer of the Declaration of Independence is the most important historical figure connected with the structure. Other figures of national importance, such as Lafayette, Madison, and Jefferson, are reported to have visited the Floyd House; however, their stays seem to have been very brief.

C. Sources of Information:

Bullock, Helen Duprey. "Preservation Features—Accomplishments and Challenge," Historic Preservation, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1964), 124-125.

Floyd, General William, House. Personal interview with Mrs. David Weld and Mr. William Floyd Nichols, owners. November 10, 1964.

Maxwell, William Q. A Portrait of William Floyd, Long Islander. Setauket, Long Island, New York: The Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, 1956.

Murphy, Robert Cushman. Fish-Shape Paumanok: Nature and Man on Long Island. Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1964.

Murphy, Robert Cushman. Letter to the Editor, "Threat to Land-Mark," New York Times, March 17, 1964.

Nichols, Mrs. John Treadwell. "As Told by the Attic Letters (In the Floyd House at Mastic, Long Island) to Cornelia Floyd Nichols." 116 Ninth Street, Garden City, Long Island, New York, 1952. (Typed manuscript)

Nichols, Mrs. John Treadwell, and Shaw, Osborn. Addresses  
Delivered on the Occasion of a Visit to the General  
Floyd House at Mastic, Long Island. Setauket, Long Island,  
New York: The Society for the Preservation of Long Island  
Antiquities, 1950.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

- Brookhaven, Long Island, New York, Town Records
- According to Mrs. David Weld, the caretaker in the mid-19th c. dictated a description of the property. The written account—which is concerned primarily with the outbuildings and not with the main house—now is in the possession of Mrs. Weld's mother, Mrs. Cornelia Floyd Nichols.
- Mrs. Weld has also indicated that New York State made some records of the General William Floyd House approximately fifteen years ago. Correspondence in November, 1964, with Miss Anna K. Cunningham, Supervisor of Historic Sites (University of the State of New York; State Education Department; Albany 1, New York) has indicated that no records are immediately available in her department; however, further investigation of New York State records might reveal valuable information.

Prepared by John C. Poppeliers  
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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest and merit: Although the General William Floyd House has few decorative details that in themselves give the structure great distinction, the building as a whole has many pleasing architectural features and provides a unique visual history of the continuous development of a rural eighteenth-century manor house that has remained in the possession of the original family. The additions and alterations that have been made are, in general, easily identifiable, and indicate a marked respect and concern for the fabric as it existed up to that point. Only the original portion, which records indicate dates probably from the 1730's, cannot easily be identified. A limited investigation by a technician should reveal the exact dating of each portion of the structure.
2. Condition of fabric: A survey of the General William Floyd House indicated that the structure is generally in good condition and is well maintained. It is now used only as a summer residence, but a caretaker and his family live in the east wing. A number of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century conveniences, such as plumbing, were obviously installed or added to serve for seasonal rather than permanent residence, and are unsatisfactory both aesthetically and practically.

B. Detailed Description of Exterior:

1. Number of stories: The two-story main block has a one-and-a-half story side (east) wing and two rear wings of one-and-a-half and two stories.
2. Number of bays: Main block--seven-bay front. Side(east) wing--three-bay front. The side elevations and rear wings are too irregular to describe in terms of bays.
3. Layout: The main block is rectangular (approximately 59'-5" x 30'-3 1/2"). The side (east) wing is also rectangular (approximately 27'-0" x 28'-9"). Two prominent rectangular wings project from the north (rear) side--the one-and-a-half story wing projects from the east (side) wing, and the two-story wing projects from the center of the main block. Both of these wings have had a number of later additions that partially obscure their general massing and considerably impair the architectural unity of the east and north elevations.

4. Foundations: The foundations of the supposedly newer (west) section of the main block are of fieldstone (approximately 5-1/2' height exposed in the basement) with later brick "infilling" and brick piers. The east section of this block and the east (side) wing are evidently of similar construction. The foundations of the rear wings also were not accessible; evidently, however, these wings do not have full basements.
5. Wall construction and structural system: The entire structure is of wooden frame construction with clapboarding (and occasionally shingling) painted white. Main block: The clapboarding of the front facade of the main block is approximately 4-5/8" to the weather; that of the west side of the main block 8-3/4" to 9-1/4" to the weather (while under the shed roof of the one-story side (west) porch there is matched siding); the rear of the main block has narrow clapboarding from 4-3/8" to 4-1/2" to the weather; and the small exposed portions of the east side (to which the smaller east wing is attached) has shingling. The use of shingling here is of particular note since in the central portion of the attic of the main block there is a partition that is still partially covered also with shingling (facing west). This would indicate that the eastern portion of the main block is earlier--though how much earlier is yet to be ascertained--than the western. Visually the exterior of the main block does not indicate the difference in construction dates.
6. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: The one-story screened front porch (20'-4" front x 10'-1/2"), which leads to the central "hall," has a flat roof that is slightly pitched. The four, square, wooden columns sit on rather crudely made 2'-5" high plinths; the "capitals," too, are crudely made. The relatively narrow wooden flooring is of uniform width. This porch is of later date than the rest of the main facade.

The one-story porch on the west side of the main block has a shed roof and four, narrow, square, partially chamfered, wooden posts. The flooring is of narrow, uniform (3/4") width boards. As has been previously discussed, matched siding is used on the main structure under this porch. Also under this porch, two, seldom-used, six-paneled wooden doors give direct access to the interior. A similar one-story, shed-roofed porch--apparently of a fairly recent twentieth-century date--has been built on the east side of the east wing. This porch gives access to the caretaker's apartment, which is located in the end section of this wing.

Before the "Dutch door" entry at the south (front) side of the east wing, there is a monolithic stone stoop, which has low, vertically tooled sides.

A small, covered, wooden entry porch on the east side of the "kitchen" wing (the rear wing which extends northward from the east wing) has a low-pitched shed roof, waist-high "railing" with vertical siding, and open, diagonal lattice-work above this.

Access to the basement of the main block is through a bulkhead situated at the rear (north) of the western half of this block and is adjacent to the two-story rear wing. The five descending stairs are of concrete, and are approximately 4' in length. The bulkhead is covered by two wooden doors.

7. Chimneys: The main block has two large brick rectangular chimneys at the gable ridge. An older, narrower, brick chimney--also rectangular in plan--is situated at the eastern end of the gable ridge of the east wing. Each of the rear wings has a rectangular brick chimney that appears to be contemporary with the main section's chimneys rather than with that of the east wing.

8. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors:

- (1) Main block: The double architrave of the main (south) entry and the six high raised panels and the moldings of the "Dutch door" indicate a probable date in the mid-eighteenth century. The door itself may have been moved from another location. It appears that the lower rail was cut to fit this location. The two exterior doors on the western elevation originally may have been interior doors. In the background of the Ralph Earl portrait (c. 1790) of William Floyd (which now--1964--hangs in the house) the house is shown in the background and indicates that a side wing at one time existed on the west side of the main block. This side wing balanced the extant east wing. The asymmetric placing of these two doors and the one side window on the western elevation would also indicate that a smaller, one-story wing at one time stood here, and that in order to give access to that wing from both side rooms of the main block, the doors would have to be placed in these positions. The doors themselves appear to be nineteenth century and "overly

delicate" for exterior doors. They are six paneled and wooden.

- (2) Side (east) wing: The upper section of the "Dutch door" in the south (front) side of the east wing is also eighteenth century, as is the hardware; i.e., latch, knocker, and escutcheon. The lower section of the door is obviously a later replacement. Over the door is a three-light transom. A pulley device (with a wooden exterior weight housing) is attached to the simple screen door. The door in the eastern side is a later (twentieth century) wooden addition.
- (3) Rear (northeast) kitchen wing: The "old kitchen" wing has two exterior doors on the eastern side, one of which gives direct access to the exterior and is fabricated of narrow vertical boarding and has four lights. The exterior of the other door is protected by the small, pitched-roofed porch. According to the present owners (1964), it is thought that this wing may have originally been the west wing (shown in the Ralph Earl portrait).
- (4) Rear (north) wing: Frequently called the "new kitchen wing" (built c. 1880, with northern (rear) additions c. 1920), the doors are wooden and consistent with the construction dates.

b. Windows and shutters:

- (1) Main block: The basement windows of the main block generally have eight-light single wooden sash that are hinged at the top and swing inward. A number of these also have small segmental brick retaining walls on the exterior.

The first-floor south (front) windows each have twelve-over-twelve light double-hung wooden sash. Those two windows that are on either side of the main entry and under the porch roof have two louvered shutters each. The remaining four windows each have two three-paneled wooden shutters.

The seven second-floor south (front) windows each have twelve-over-twelve light double-hung wooden sash, and each has two louvered wooden shutters.

The single window on the first floor of the east side has nine-over-nine light double-hung wooden sash with one, wide, six-paneled, wooden shutter,

which rests against the south front of the one-and-a-half story east wing when it is open (since the frame of this window is flush with the smaller wing). The single, centered attic window on the east side of the main block has four-over-four light double-hung wooden sash and no shutters.

The single first-floor window of the west side of the main block has twelve-over-twelve light double-hung wooden sash and two, simple, two-paneled wooden shutters. The second-story window directly above this last one has also twelve-over-twelve light double-hung wooden sash; the two wooden shutters, however, are louvered. The other second-story window on the west side is narrower and has nine-over-nine light double-hung wooden sash and no shutters. The two, narrow, shutterless, attic windows--similar to the single one on the east side--have four-over-four light double-hung wooden sash and are symmetrically placed.

In general, the rear (north) windows of the main block also have twelve-over-twelve light double-hung wooden sash; however, each has only a single wooden shutter.

- (2) Side (east) wing: The three windows on the south (front) side of this early wing have two-over-four light double-hung wooden sash, and each has two, two-paneled, wooden shutters. A similar window with similar shutters is on the west side. Another smaller (approximately square) six-light window is also on the west elevation. This window is probably a twentieth-century addition--as are the porch and door to the caretaker's apartment on this elevation.

The three dormers on the south side (front) of the east wing have six-light casement windows; each of these has two louvered wooden shutters. The two east side windows are similar and also have louvered shutters. These five, attic-story windows are fitted with two-section, wooden frame screens.

- (3) Rear (northeast) kitchen wing: The five first-story windows on the east side of this wing are irregularly placed, and have six-over-six light double-hung wooden sash and no shutters. There are three, small, shutterless windows with three-over-three light double-hung wooden sash on the second-floor level of this side. These are similar to a window at the same level on the west side of the

wing. This east elevation also has one dormer with a four-light wooden sash. (The two dormers on the west side of the gable roof of this wing are also similar.)

The low one-story shed that encases the rear (north) and west sides of the wing has several small windows of at least two different sizes. They generally have six-light sash. The north gable end has a single, centrally located window with a wooden sash.

- (4) Rear (north) wing: The 1880's wing with its twentieth-century rear additions was not noted so thoroughly by the recorder during his visit. His investigation was oriented toward a general architectural and historical evaluation and toward an appraisal of the earlier sections of the house. It was also felt that generally the main features of this wing--such as the two-over-two light double-hung wooden sash in the 1880's addition--are still consistent with the construction dates. This wing has been used in recent years as the owners' summer living quarters.

9. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roofs of the main block, east side wing, northeast kitchen wing, and the 1880's section of the north wing are all gable. The shed on the kitchen wing, the 1920's sections of the north wing, and the open porches have low, single-pitched roofs. The entire structure was covered c. 1962 with new wooden shingles.
- b. Cornices: The deep, projecting cornices of the main block and the front side wing (all with unusually long returns) are each composed of a wide plain bed mold, two-part undecorated corona, and two-part undecorated crown mold. The raking cornice of the main block is similar and the overhang is also extremely deep. These cornices are obviously later, nineteenth-century replacements of the original and are an awkward intrusion into the general harmony of the eighteenth-century facade. The cornices of the remaining portions of the structure--if, in fact, they can be referred to as cornices--are plain wooden boards.
- c. Dormers: There are three frame dormers with simple wooden triangular pediments on the south (front) roof of the east wing. The sides of these dormers

have clapboarding and their gable roofs are covered with wooden shingles with which the entire roof was covered c. 1962. These three dormers probably are nineteenth-century additions---but a firm date of construction could only be ascertained by a detailed investigation of the fabric itself. The northeast kitchen wing has three frame dormers with low, pitched roofs.

C. Detailed Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The main block is essentially central-hall in plan; this hall, however, is approximately 14'-4" wide and is, in effect, a large "living" room. To the east of the central hall are three rooms (one in front, two small ones in the rear), and to the west there are two. The second floor follows a modified, yet similar, pattern. At the north end of the central hall, there is a "Dutch" door that gives access to the two-story north wing. Access to the one-and-a-half story east wing is through the front southeast living room, and access to the northeast "old kitchen" wing is through the main block's northeast pantry.
2. Stairways: The single-run, main stairway is at the east side of the main block's central hall. It has fourteen risers with two simple, square, wooden balusters per tread, and a simple, square newel post. The line of the handrail and balusters is thought to be the western extent of the older (eastern) section of the main block.  
  
There are also smaller stairways in the wings. These, however, were not noted in detail in this survey. (The one in the east wing leads to an area known as the "spinning chamber." In the late nineteenth or early twentieth century a bathroom, the pipes of which are partially exterior, was installed in this section.)
3. Flooring: The flooring of the first floor of the main block is now of uniform (3-3/8" width) boarding, running north-south (the exception is the southwest first-floor parlor with its even narrower (2" wide) board flooring); however, investigation of the flooring from the basement indicates that under this narrow boarding are older random-width boards running east-west. The flooring of the northeast kitchen wing is similar to this older section.

The narrow-board flooring in the 1880's north wing again is consistent with its date of construction. Sections of the east wing were not accessible at the time of this recording.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: In general, the wall and ceiling finish is plaster on wooden lath. Many of the rooms, particularly in the main block, have been covered with floral-pattern wallpaper. The wallpaper that is now visible is from the twentieth century.
5. Doorways and doors; decorative features and trim: A description and approximate dating of each of the major doorways can be found under exterior data. The moldings of the architraves, window frames and sash, and chair rails of the interior of the main block indicate generally an eighteenth-century date. Interestingly, another "Dutch" door opposite the main entry leads into the 1880's rear wing.

Though none of these details is an unusual example of fine eighteenth-century woodwork, collectively they are probably the most extensive surviving architectural indication of eighteenth-century manorial life on Long Island.

Most of the fireplace mantels, both in the main block and in the two earlier wings, are simple wooden eighteenth-century mantels. The exception to this is a mid-nineteenth century marble mantelpiece in the large (approximately 16'-5" x 17'-6") southwest first-floor parlor. The furnishings in this room also date from the mid-nineteenth century.

Though a discussion of the furnishings of the house is not at this point entirely apropos, it is important to note in any discussion of the Floyd House that it has several pieces of fine furniture. A group in the den of the main block (northwest corner, first floor) consists of a particularly fine New York table (c. 1690-1720), an American fancy Sheridan chair (c. 1825), and a Windsor chair that is perhaps of English make. In another room of the main block there are a New York Chippendale secretary (c. 1760-80) and an American country Chippendale chair (c. 1770). These pieces, in addition to the Earl portrait of William Floyd (c. 1790) and a Charles William Peale portrait of David Gelston, were noted cursorily.

6. Notable hardware: Some of the exterior wrought-iron hardware, such as the latch, hinges, knocker, and escutcheon of the front door of the east wing, are from the eighteenth century. A more thorough technical investigation of other exterior hardware (e.g., the HL hinges on the two doors on the west elevation of the main block) would be necessary to determine their precise provenance. The general impression of the interior hardware (main block) is that it is

from the eighteenth century. The hardware in the 1880's wing is contemporary with its construction. This wing, with its 1920's additions, also has a modern kitchen and bathroom with twentieth-century fixtures and hardware of no particular note.

7. Lighting: Modern, electric lighting.
8. Heating: Most of the rooms in the main block and the two older wings were originally heated by fireplaces. Of particular note still is the brick fireplace complex in the "old kitchen" wing. The main hearth has a 5' high opening with brick side ovens. Accessible from the western shed addition to this northeast wing, and part of this same complex, is a built-in laundry kettle and hearth.

Most of the structure can now be heated by a "pipeless" coal furnace. The caretaker's apartment in the east wing obviously has a separate heating unit.

- D. Site: The main structure faces south toward Narrow Bay, Fire Island, and the Atlantic. Most of the property of over six hundred acres is now wooded, except for the open area that fronts the house and the large open "pathway" that leads to open water. To the west of the house there are indications of a former formal garden--probably nineteenth century. Random-placed bushes and trees of various sizes surround the house. Access to the main house is from the north by dirt roads. To the north of the main house--and separated from it by a vertical board fence approximately 5' to 6' high--are the remains of an extensive manor or farm "community." The outbuildings that remain are of frame construction, and include: a carriage barn, a tool house, two corn cribs, a wood shed, three small barns or carriage sheds. All of these are covered with shingled roofs and, with one exception, painted red. The roof of an icehouse is visible. The remains of the foundations of larger barns are also visible.

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